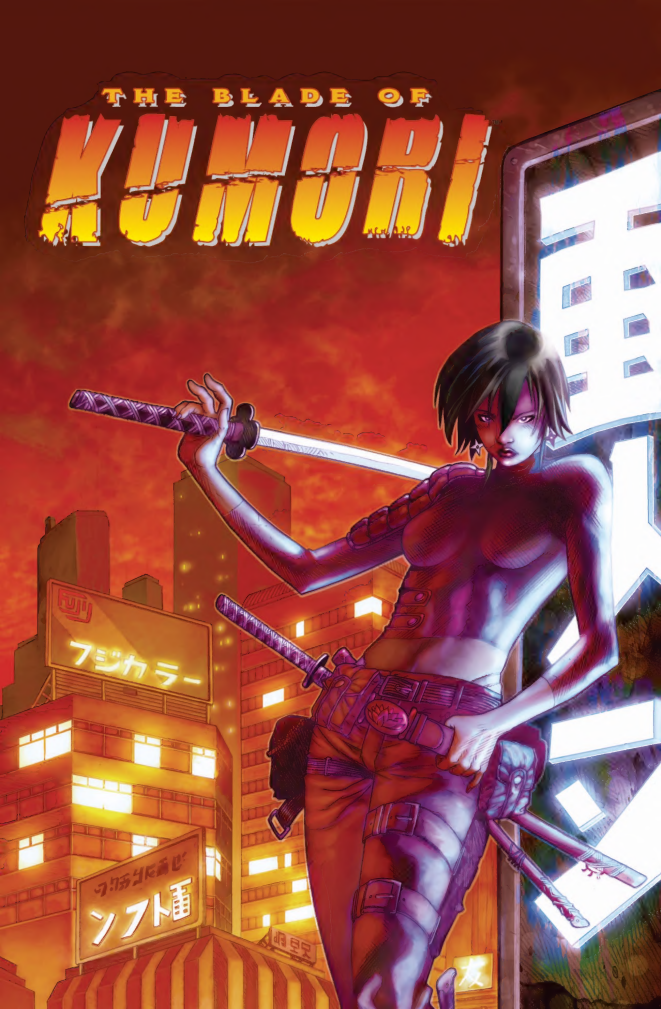
THE BLADE OF
KUMORI
フジカラー

THE BLADE OF KUMORI

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CHAPTER 1
フジカラー
ソフト面

"I MUST SAY THAT TO DIE WITH ONE'S SWORD STILL SHEATHED IS MOST REGRETTABLE."
-- MIYAMOTO MUSASHI
JAPAN.
1868.
COWARDS!
COWARDS ARMED WITH COWARDS' WEAPONS!
FACE US...

FIRST LINE READY...
...AIM...
DOG.
UKK!
...FIRE!
PAFF
PAFF
AHNF!

...SEE HOW WARRIORS DIE!
THAT ONE LEADS THEM! ASHINA TOSHINAGA!
READY...
...AIM...
GLAAH!
HT!
THESE INSECTS IN THE AIR STING...

...DO THEY NOT, BROTHER?
NOBUTERU.
EVER MY SAVIOR.
I AM... -NNR-
...I AM FINE.
IT WILL TAKE MORE THAN THESE, COWARDS! WEAPONS TO HARM ME.
UNFORTUNATELY, THE COWARDS OUTNUMBER US TEN TO ONE, TOSHINAGA...
...AND MORE OF THEM SPILL INTO THE COMPOUND BY THE MINUTE.
WE ARE BEING OVERWHELMED.
THE TEMPLE WALLS WILL BE OUR LAST BARRICADE.
AS GOOD A PLACE AS ANY...

..TO MAKE OUR STAND.
BAR THE DOOR!
LET ME SEE TO YOUR WOUNDS, BROTHER.
THESE ARE NOT THE WOUNDS THAT WILL KILL ME.
A FEW DOZEN MEN. TWICE THAT MANY ARROWS.
THE END DRAWS NEAR, NOBUTERU.
BUT BETTER I DIE THAN SUFFER WHAT IS TO COME!
IN THEIR LUST FOR THE MODERN WORLD THEY WOULD DESTROY EVERYTHING WE ARE.

THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR WILL PASS FROM THE FACE OF THE WORLD.
NO!
BROTHER?
THERE IS NO OUTCOME HERE SAVE DEATH.
IN THE CONFUSION AND SMOKE, ONE MAN MIGHT SLIP THROUGH THE IMPERIAL TROOPS.
IF THOSE WHO REMAIN WERE TO ATTACK, CREATE A DIVERSION, ONE MAN MIGHT ESCAPE.
NO.
MY PLACE IS HERE!
IF WE ARE TO DIE, I WILL DO SO AT YOUR SIDE, BROTHER. DO NOT TAKE THAT HONOR AWAY FROM ME!
I AM ELDEST. THE CLAN IS MINE, AND THE DECISION IS MINE.
CLAN ASHINA WILL LIVE, EVEN IF IT MUST BE IN SECRET.
TAKE THE SWORD AND GO, NOBUTERU.
WHY DO YOU FORCE THIS UPON--
TAKE IT.

YES.
GO AND LIVE, LITTLE BROTHER.
DIE WELL, TOSHINAGA.
GATHER YOURSELVES, SAMURAI OF THE CLAN ASHINA!
TAKE UP YOUR SWORDS ONE LAST TIME! KNOW THAT THOUGH WE ALL DIE THIS NIGHT...
...WHAT WE ARE WILL LIVE ON!

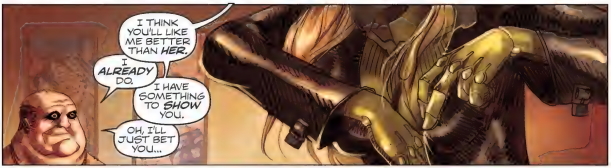
JAPAN.
NOW.
MR. ANDERSON?
I HAVE BROUGHT TEA FOR YOU.
TEA?
FER CRISSAKES, I LOOK LIKE QUEEN ELIZABETH TO YOU?
YOU BRING ME SOMETHING TO DRINK, IT BETTER BEGIN WITH "S" AND END WITH "OTCH!"

ANYWAY...
-mpfhe-
-mpfhe-
...A DRINK AIN'T WHAT I'M INTERESTED IN.
WHY DON'T YOU SHUCK THAT ROBE AND SLIDE YOUR SKINNY ASS IN HERE TO KEEP ME COMPANY?
I'M SORRY TO DISAPPOINT YOU, MR. ANDERSON, BUT I FEAR THAT WOULD NOT BE WISE.
PERHAPS THE TEA WOULD RELAX--
HEY, WITH THE AMOUNT OF MONEY I'M PAYING YOU, I THINK I DESERVE A LITTLE ATTENTION!
ALL THAT STUFF ABOUT YOU BEING THE BEST MONEY CAN BUY.
C'MERE, I WANNA SEE WHAT'S UNDER THAT ROBE...

KEEP YOUR HANDS TO *YOURSELF*, MR. ANDERSON.
EEAGH!
HOW'D YOU...
...HOW DID YOU DO...
NOK NOK
HELLO?

DID YOU ORDER A WOMAN?
NO.
WELL, I DON'T SEE ANY REASON TO BE HASTY. I'M SURE WE CAN WORK OUT SOME KIND OF--
HOW DID YOU GET PAST THE OUTER DOOR?
THE FRONT DESK SENT ME UP.
NO IT DIDN'T...

HGNH!


I THINK YOU'LL LIKE ME BETTER THAN HER.
I ALREADY DO.
I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.
OH, I'LL JUST BET YOU...

...DO.
YOU'VE OUTLIVED YOUR USEFULNESS, MR. ANDERSON.
FISHER ASKED ME TO TELL YOU HE NEVER LIKED YOU, ANYWAY. THAT...
...AND HE'S BEEN SLEEPING WITH YOUR WIFE FOR THE LAST YEAR. THE ONE YOU HAVE NOW NOT THE UGLY ONE.
Whuh...
...buh... buh...

...buh...
BLAM

SWISH
HE'S A PIG...
...BUT HE'S UNDER MY PROTECTION.
UNDER YOUR PROTECTION...
...RIGHT UP UNTIL I KILL HIM.
SKRAASH

SONY

KRUNK

SHERRASH
GOOD.

SHING
UHF!

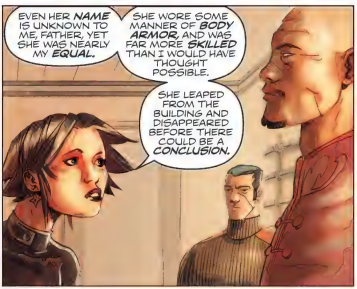
NEXT TIME.

KUMORI?
WELCOME BACK, DAUGHTER.
YOUR BROTHER AND I ARE MOST PLEASED AT YOUR RETURN...

...YOUR SAFE RETURN.
I'M HAPPY TO SEE BOTH OF YOU, FATHER.
MR. ANDERSON WAS UNDERSTANDABLY SATISFIED AT HAVING RETAINED OUR SERVICES FOR HIS STAY IN TOKYO.

HE DID HOWEVER, COMPLAIN THAT YOU "COULD HAVE BEEN FRIENDLIER."
YOU PROTECT HIM NEXT TIME, SHIGERU.
THOUGH I'M NOT SURE YOU'RE HIS TYPE.

YOU MAKE ME PROUD, KUMORI, BOTH AS A FATHER AND AS CLAN LEADER.
CLAN ASHINA SURVIVES IN SECRET, BUT THAT WE SURVIVE AT ALL IS DUE TO THE EFFORTS OF YOU AND THE OTHER SAMURAI WHO SERVE OUR BANNER.
I'M TOLD A WOMAN OPPOSED YOU?


EVEN HER NAME IS UNKNOWN TO ME, FATHER, YET SHE WAS NEARLY MY EQUAL.
SHE WORE SOME MANNER OF BODY ARMOR, AND WAS FAR MORE SKILLED THAN I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT POSSIBLE.
SHE LEAPED FROM THE BUILDING AND DISAPPEARED BEFORE THERE COULD BE A CONCLUSION.

I HAVE NEVER FACED ANYONE LIKE HER BEFORE.

WORD OF YOUR RETURN REACHED ME ONLY NOW, KUMORI.
HIRO!

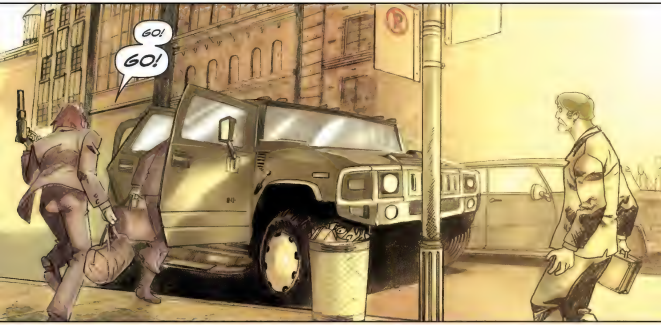
I APOLOGIZE FOR INTERRUPTING, LORD KOJI. I MEANT NO OFFENSE.
NONE IS TAKEN, HIRO.
YOU ARE PART OF THIS CLAN, JUST AS SURELY AS IF YOU HAD BEEN BORN INTO IT.
KUMORI, YOU HAVE HAD LITTLE TIME TO REST, BUT I FEAR ANOTHER TASK AWAITS YOU.
I REALIZE I ASK MUCH OF YOU...
...BUT YOU ARE THE BEST OF US.
ASK AND IT SHALL BE DONE, FATHER.
THIS TIME IT IS NOT PROTECTION YOU WILL OFFER. JUST THE OPPOSITE.
YOU MUST JOURNEY TO AMERICA. A CLIENT WISHES THIS MAN TO BE REMOVED.

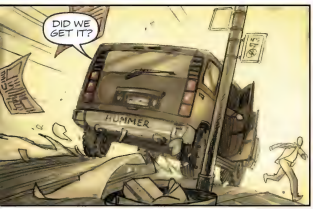
HE FANCIES HIMSELF A HERO.
HE NEEDS TO DIE.
Manhattan surveillance 10/17/04
CONTINUED!

CHAPTER 2

"YOU WIN BATTLES BY KNOWING THE ENEMY'S TIMING, AND USING A TIMING WHICH THE ENEMY DOES NOT EXPECT."
-- MIYAMOTO MUSASHI
Father,
It is not my place to question the decisions you make as leader of Clan Ashina. You have safeguarded our ways and our honor.
Rather, I come to you as a son who expresses concern for his family, and for his sister. This task you have set before Kumori is, I fear, beyond her.
You ask her to remove this American hero, yet she has never been placed in a circumstance that demanded she slay an opponent. She has never been to the West, let alone New York City. She is not ready.
Better if you had given this assignment to me. All you need do is ask, and gladly would I take her place in this. I am ready to serve you, Father.
Your Son,
Shigeru
FASTER.
BANK

I'M SORRY, I ...PLEASE, IT'S JUST...
IT'S HARD WITH YOU POINTING GUNS AT ME...
WE'RE BANK ROBBERS. IT'S WHAT WE DO.
IF WE JUST ASKED NICELY, YOU PROBABLY WOULDN'T BE ALL THAT ANXIOUS TO GIVE US THE MONEY. WOULD YOU?
ALL...
...ALL RIGHT, THAT'S... THAT'S EVERYTHING.
OH, I'M SURE THAT'S NOT EVERYTHING...
...BUT CLOSE ENOUGH THAT I WON'T CARE ONCE I'M SITTING ON THE BEACH IN TAHITI.
YOU CAN GO AHEAD AND TRIP THE SILENT ALARM NOW, WE'LL BE LONG GONE.
AND KEEP HUGGING THE FLOOR, SO NOBODY GETS SHOT IN THE FACE.
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, YOU'VE BEEN A LOVELY AUDIENCE.
PLEASE TIP YOUR WAITRESS AND DRIVE SAFELY.

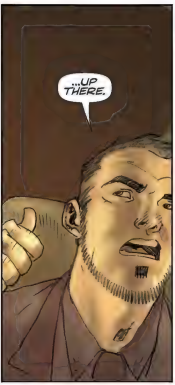

GO!
GO!


DID WE GET IT?
HUMMER

"DID WE GET IT?" DID WE GET IT?
YOU KIDDING ME? THE TELLER WAS SO SCARED SHE WOULD'VE HANDED ME HER BRA AND PANTIES IF I TOLD HER TO.
IN THAT CASE, YOU WANT ME TO GO BACK? I MEAN...

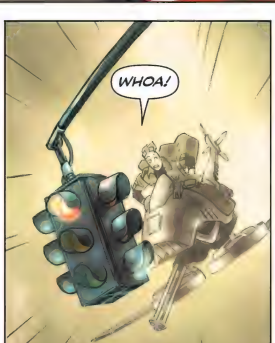
...IT'S NOT LIKE THE COPS'LL EVER CATCH US.

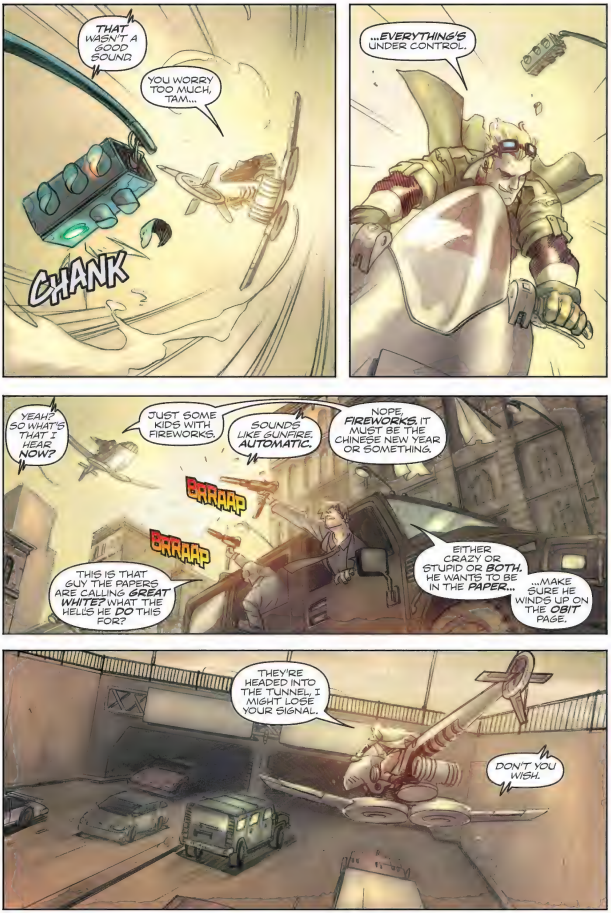
SON OF A BITCH!
WE'RE BEING FOLLOWED.
BY WHO? I DON'T SEE ANYBODY BEHIND US.
NOT BACK THERE...


...UP THERE.

GOT 'EM.
THEY'RE HEADED SOUTH ON FIFTH, JUST PASSING THROUGH THE INTERSECTION AT FORTY-EIGHTH.
JUST DON'T WRECK THE SKY SHARK LIKE YOU DID LAST WEEK, OKAY? IT'S NOT LIKE WE HAVE AN ENDLESS SUPPLY.
OH, COME ON. THAT WAS A ONE-TIME THING. IT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN AGAIN.
PROMISE.
ONLY IN NEW YORK...

MOMMY, LOOK!
THE GREAT WHITE MAN!
DON'T STARE.
CALL ME! 555-6721!
STOP PLAYING TO THE CROWD AND PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT YOU'RE DOING.
I AM PAYING ATTENTION.


WHOA!


THAT WASN'T A GOOD SOUND.
YOU WORRY TOO MUCH, TAM...
CHANK
...EVERYTHING'S UNDER CONTROL.
YEAH? SO WHAT'S THAT I HEAR NOW?
JUST SOME KIDS WITH FIREWORKS.
SOUNDS LIKE GUNFIRE. AUTOMATIC.
NOPE. FIREWORKS. IT MUST BE THE CHINESE NEW YEAR OR SOMETHING.
BRRRAP
BRRRAP
THIS IS THAT GUY THE PAPERS ARE CALLING GREAT WHITE? WHAT THE HELL'S HE DO THIS FOR?
EITHER CRAZY OR STUPID OR BOTH. HE WANTS TO BE IN THE PAPER...
...MAKE SURE HE WINDS UP ON THE OBIT PAGE.
THEY'RE HEADED INTO THE TUNNEL. I MIGHT LOSE YOUR SIGNAL.
DON'T YOU WISH.

I BOOSTED THE TRANSCEIVER SIGNAL LAST TIME I WORKED ON THE SHARK. YOU COULD PICK ME UP IF YOU WERE IN HOBOKEN.
SEE... GREAT.
TRY TO CONTAIN YOUR ENTHUSIASM.
BRRAAP
BRRAAP
SORRY. I GET TESTY WHEN PEOPLE ARE SHOOTING AT ME.
"KIDS WITH FIREWORKS" THAT'S WHAT I HEARD.
THEY'RE BIG KIDS...
...AND THEY PLAY ROUGH.
KLIK
CHUKKA CHUKKA CHUKKA CHUKKA
RWOMF
SCREEEEE
YOU WERE CAREFUL NOT TO—
YES, I WAS CAREFUL NOT TO HIT ANYBODY. NOT LIKE WE'VE GOT ARMOR-PIERCING LOADED UP, ANYWAY.
GIVE ME A LITTLE CREDIT.

KROOOSH!

DOESN'T ANYBODY EVER GIVE UP ANYMORE?
WHAT'S GOING ON?
THE USUAL. THEY'RE TAKING OFF ON FOOT.

THAT'S IT. END OF THE LINE FOR THESE GUYS.

YOU WANTED TO BE THE HERO, PROTECT THE PUBLIC AND ALL THAT.
SEEMED LIKE A GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME...
BRAM!
GH

POM!
BRRAAP
BRRAAP
HHNNN

OH...

...CRAP.

CAMERON? SAM?
NO PROBLEM, TAM...
...EVERYTHING'S...
...JUST...
...FINE.
BRAM
SPANG
SPANG
SPANG
SPANG
UHF?
HGGN!
BRRAAP
AW, MAN. I'M GONNA BE IN TROUBLE WHEN I GET HOME...
YOU'RE IN TROUBLE NOW.
"GREAT WHITE," HUH? THAT BECAUSE YOU SINK YOUR TEETH INTO CRIME?
WELL, REALLY. IT'S JUST A DUMB NAME THE NEWSPAPERS CAME UP WITH.
TRUTHFULLY, I'M NOT ALL THAT CRAZY ABOUT IT.

TOO BAD, 'CAUSE THAT'S PROBABLY WHAT THEY'LL PUT ON YOUR TOMBSTONE.
HAVEN'T YOU NOTICED ALL YOU HERO TYPES WIND UP DEAD SOONER OR LATER?
I WAS KIND OF COUNTING ON...
...LATER!
BRRAAP
PWHH!
THAT WAS EASY.

OH, I AM SERIOUSLY GOING TO KICK YOUR ASS, CAMERON WHITE.
LOOK AT THIS...
...JUST LOOK!
WHAT'S THE FIRST THING I SAID TO YOU? THE FIRST THING!
DON'T WRECK THE SKY SHARK.
DON'T WRECK THE SKY SHARK.
SO WHY AM I LOOKING AT A WRECKED SKY SHARK?
DO YOU LIKE DESTROYING THE EQUIPMENT I DESIGN? IS THAT IT?
NOT REALLY, BUT--
THEN WHY IS IT THAT EVERY TIME YOU GO ON ONE OF YOUR LITTLE ADVENTURES, MY HARDWARE COMES BACK HERE ON A FLATBED?
IN PIECES!
THIS IS SUPPOSED TO BE A PARTNERSHIP, RIGHT? THAT'S WHAT WE AGREED I DESIGN THE TOYS AND YOU PLAY WITH THEM...
...WITHOUT BREAKING THEM.
YOUR FATHER MIGHT'VE LEFT YOU A SMALL FORTUNE BUT IT GETS SMALLER EVERY TIME YOU WRECK SOMETHING.
I SAID I WAS SORRY, TAM.

YOU ALWAYS SAY YOU'RE SORRY.
WELL....
...AREN'T YOU AT LEAST GLAD I'M NOT HURT?
GLAD.
YOU'RE NOT.
HURT.
YOU KNOW WHAT, YOUR PROBLEM IS, MISTER I'M-GOING-TO-PLAY-HERO GLORY-HOUND?
YOUR PROBLEM IS YOU NEVER THINK ABOUT ANYONE EXCEPT YOURSELF!
THAT'S NOT TRUE!...
...I THINK ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE ALL THE, UH...
I'M GOING OUT.
EMMANUEL, HE'S ALL YOURS.
UH-HUH.
NICE TALKING TO YOU, TAM.
PISSED HER OFF AGAIN, HUH?
YUP.
I DUNNO WHY SHE GETS HER PANTIES ALL BUNCHED UP.
SHE JUST INVENTS THE STUFF. I'M THE ONE WHO'S GOTTA FIX IT EVERY TIME YOU TRASH SOMETHING.
YOU KNOW... WOMEN...
I'M STARVING. WANNA GO GET SOME CHINESE?
NAH, THINK I'LL STAY HERE AND GET A HEAD START ON REPAIRS.
MAYBE THAT'LL COOL TAM OFF SOME.
SURE, THAT'LL HAPPEN.
SUIT YOURSELF. I'LL BRING YOU BACK SOME MOO SHU.

"YOUR FATHER MIGHT'VE LEFT YOU A SMALL FORTUNE, BUT IT GETS SMALLER EVERY TIME YOU WRECK SOMETHING."
LIKE SHE HAS TO TELL ME.
LIKE I DON'T KNOW THAT.
AND "YOUR PROBLEM IS YOU NEVER THINK ABOUT ANYONE EXCEPT YOURSELF."
YEAH, RIGHT. THAT'S WHY I'M GOING OUT THERE AND RISKING MY NECK DAMN NEAR EVERY NIGHT.
THAT'S WHY I'M TRYING TO SAVE PEOPLE AND STOP THE BAD GUYS. BECAUSE THIS IS ALL ABOUT ME.
WHY'S SHE ALWAYS HAVE TO BE SUCH A--
HUH.
WEIRD.
JEEZ, THIS IS A MESS. WHEN TAM FINDS OUT HOW BAD IT IS...
...SHE'S REALLY GONNA KILL ME...

WHACHING
UH... LADY?
DO I KNOW YOU?
I'VE BEEN SENT TO KILL YOU, CAMERON WHITE.

REALLY?
SEE, I THINK YOU MUST HAVE THE WRONG BUILDING...
...BECAUSE I DIDN'T ORDER A CUTE GIRL TRYING TO KILL ME WITH A SWORD!
BESIDES, I'M ARMED WITH A WRENCH.
A BIG WRENCH.
AND BELIEVE ME, YOU DON'T WANT ANY OF THAT.
SHANG
BRAM
BRAM
BRAM

PWING
PWING
PWING
...WELL...
...WELL... THAT'S...
...THAT'S JUST NOT POSSIBLE. NOBODY MOVES THAT FAST!
YOU KNOW, THANKS FOR STOPPING BY AND ALL. BUT I REMEMBERED I HAVE SOMEPLACE ELSE TO BE...
...SOMEPLACE I'M NOT ABOUT TO GET KILLED.
THANK YOU FOR TALKING ME INTO HAVING A FEW BACKUP SHARKS, TIM.
THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU...

WOW. HOW GOOD ARE YOU?
LISTEN...
KWUMP
...THIS THING WASN'T BUILT FOR TWO, SO YOU--
HEY!
I'M TELLING YOU, YOU MIGHT WANT TO JUMP. OFF.
SERIOUSLY. GET OFF.
LAST CHANCE...
ALL RIGHT...

...I TRIED TO WARN YOU.
SINCE YOU'RE ALONG FOR THE RIDE, CAN I ASK YOU SOMETHING?
DO I EVEN KNOW YOU?
I DON'T KNOW WHAT'S UP HERE. DID I RUN OVER YOUR DOG OR SOMETHING?
NO.
THIS IS PROFESSIONAL. NOT PERSONAL.
YOU DON'T KNOW ME, I'VE NEVER DONE ANYTHING TO YOU, BUT YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME ANYWAY?
IT'S JUST A JOB. THAT MAKES ME FEEL A LOT BETTER.
HOW ABOUT YOU AT LEAST TELL ME YOUR NAME? SEEING AS HOW YOU'RE GOING TO KILL ME, CAN'T HURT TO TELL ME, RIGHT?
I'LL TAKE IT TO MY GRAVE, I PROMISE.
KUMORI.
KUMORI.
THAT'S PRETTY. I'D PROBABLY LIKE IT EVEN BETTER IF YOU WEREN'T TRYING TO CUT MY HEAD OFF.

HANG ON, KUMORI.
THIS IS A HELL OF A THING, HERE I'VE BEEN TRYING TO DO THE RIGHT THING, TRYING TO BE ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS AND HELP PEOPLE...
...AND SOMEBODY'S SO BENT OUT OF SHAPE ABOUT IT THAT THEY TAKE OUT A CONTRACT ON ME.
DOES THAT SOUND RIGHT TO YOU?
I DO NOT JUDGE.
I SERVE MY FAMILY AND PRESERVE OUR HONOR.
OH, SO THIS IS A FAMILY THING?
LET ME GUESS... FATHER ISSUES? I KNOW WHAT THAT'S LIKE.
THAT'S TOUGH, WHEN DAD WANTS YOU TO BE A DOCTOR OR A LAWYER...
...OR IN YOUR CASE, AN UNSTOPPABLE KILLING MACHINE.

THOSE OF MY FAMILY HAVE ALWAYS BEEN WARRIORS. IT'S WHAT WE ARE.
THE FAMILY BUSINESS, HUH? YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE BUT TO FOLLOW ALONG.
MY DAD WANTED ME TO FOLLOW HIM. HE WAS AN OCEANOGRAPHER, A PRETTY FAMOUS ONE, ON PBS AND EVERYTHING.
FOR A WHILE, I DID FOLLOW HIM.

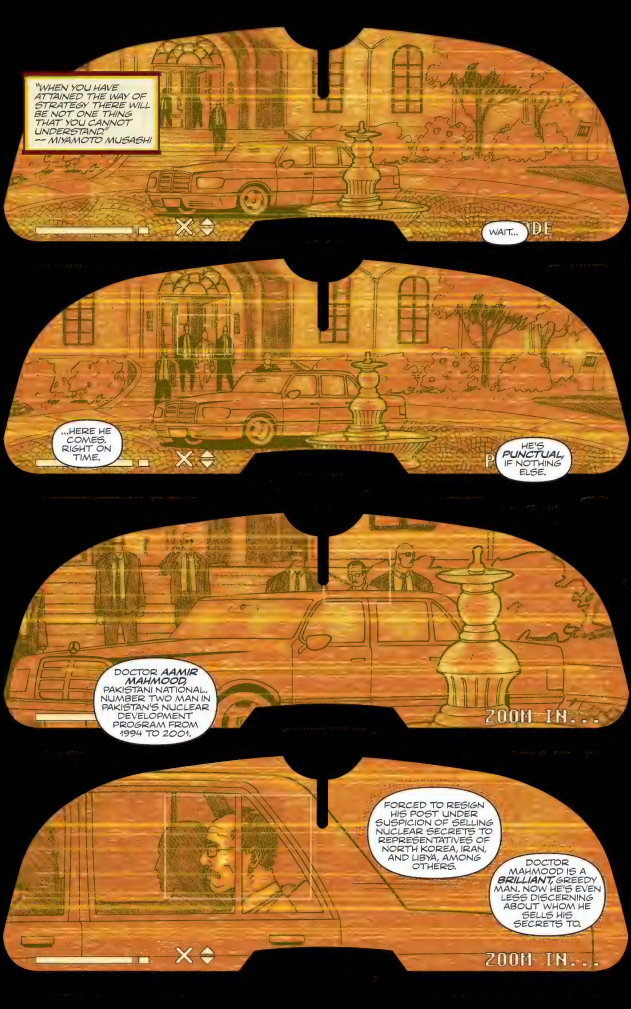
STILL HANGING ON, RIGHT?
ANYWAY, I REALIZED THAT WASN'T *ME*, IT WASN'T WHAT I WANTED TO BE DOING.
IT WAS HARD BREAKING AWAY LIKE THAT, BUT IT WAS THE ONLY WAY I WAS GOING TO BECOME WHO I *SHOULD* BE.
WHY ARE YOU *TELLING* ME THIS?
WHY HAVE YOU BROUGHT US *HERE?*
SOMETHING I'VE GOTTEN PRETTY GOOD AT IS *READING* PEOPLE.
AND IT'S PRETTY OBVIOUS TO ME THAT YOU COULD'VE *KILLED* ME ANYTIME YOU WANTED TO.
SO I'M GUESSING YOU'RE NOT ALL THAT *COMFORTABLE* WITH THIS. NEVER HAD THIS KIND OF ASSIGNMENT?
MAYBE.
OR MAYBE YOU NEVER HAD TO KILL SOMEBODY YOU'RE NOT SURE *DESERVED* IT.
HELL OF A *VIEW*, ISN'T IT? IT'S LIKE THE WHOLE *WORLD* IS STRETCHED OUT IN FRONT OF YOU.
YOU LOOK OUT THERE AND YOU KNOW THE POSSIBILITIES ARE *ENDLESS*.
I REMEMBER MY *FATHER* BRINGING ME HERE THE FIRST TIME. IN THE CAR ON THE WAY OVER, EVEN RIDING UP IN THE ELEVATOR, HE WAS TRYING TO TELL ME WHAT IT WAS LIKE.
BUT HE *COULDN'T*. THIS IS THE KIND OF THING NOBODY CAN *DESCRIBE* TO YOU.
YOU CAN'T JUST TAKE SOMEBODY'S *WORD* FOR IT. YOU HAVE TO SEE IT FOR YOURSELF AND MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION.

YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M SAYING, KUMORI?
STOP TALKING.
I JUST THOUGHT I SHOULD SEE IT ONCE MORE.
ASSUMING YOU'RE STILL GOING TO KILL ME. ASSUMING YOU THINK THAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO.
STOP...
MAKE YOUR OWN DECISION.
YOU'RE REALLY JUST A KID, AREN'T YOU...

HOPE YOU'RE NOT TOO OFFENDED.
I FIGURED IF I'M GOING TO DIE, I WANTED TO KISS A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN ONE MORE TIME.
SO...
...I GUESS THIS WHERE YOU DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.
THAT'S A RELIEF.
I WASN'T SURE WHICH WAY IT WAS GOING TO GO.
I IMAGINE YOU'RE MORE THAN CAPABLE OF FINDING YOUR OWN WAY DOWN. IT'S FUNNY...
...I DID ALL THE TALKING, BUT IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE THIS WAS ABOUT ME.
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
I FAILED.

REALLY? I DON'T SEE IT THAT WAY AT ALL.
MAYBE WE'LL RUN INTO EACH OTHER AGAIN, KUMORI.
My son,
You claim that as a member of Clan Ashina, you do not question my leadership. Yet as my son, you do that very thing.
HELL OF VIEW, ISN'T IT?
Perhaps it is difficult for you to see Kumori as anything other than your younger sister. But she is now a woman. It is time for her to know the larger world. She is as a sword yet to be tempered, waiting to be placed in the fire.
That which she endures will reveal to us, and to herself, the path her life will take.
She is something more than any of us can ever hope to be. It is my decision, and mine alone, that she is ready to begin fulfilling her promise. She will not fail in this task.
I remain,
Your Father
END.

CHAPTER 6


"WHEN YOU HAVE ATTAINED THE WAY OF STRATEGY, THERE WILL BE NOT ONE THING THAT YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND."
— MIYAMOTO MUSASHI
WAIT...
...HERE HE COMES. RIGHT ON TIME.
HE'S PUNCTUAL, IF NOTHING ELSE.
DOCTOR AAMIR MAHMOOD, PAKISTANI NATIONAL, NUMBER TWO MAN IN PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM FROM 1994 TO 2001.
ZOOM IN...
FORCED TO RESIGN HIS POST UNDER SUSPICION OF SELLING NUCLEAR SECRETS TO REPRESENTATIVES OF NORTH KOREA, IRAN, AND LIBYA, AMONG OTHERS.
DOCTOR MAHMOOD IS A BRILLIANT, GREEDY MAN. NOW, HE'S EVEN LESS DISCERNING ABOUT WHOM HE SELLS HIS SECRETS TO.
ZOOM IN...

THEY'RE AWAY..
..WHICH GIVES US THIRTY MINUTES TO REACH THE MEET SITE.
HIRO, YOU ARRANGED FOR A STREET DISTURBANCE TO DELAY THEM EN ROUTE?
A RUG VENDOR'S CART WILL COLLAPSE IN FRONT OF THEM ON A SIDE STREET.
WHY PICK THE HAGIA SOPHIA, OF ALL PLACES?
BECAUSE IT'S THE MOST PUBLIC OF ALL PLACES, SISTER.

DON'T LECTURE ME, SHIGERU.
IT WAS A RHETORICAL QUESTION.

KUMORI...
..YOU'RE SURE YOU'RE UP TO THIS?
I DIDN'T COME ALL THE WAY TO ISTANBUL TO WATCH.
IF THE AMERICANS WANT MAHMOOD DEAD...

...THAT'S WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN.
DO YOU WANT TO GO OVER THE LOGISTICS ONCE MORE, SISTER?

I REALIZE YOU AND HIRO WERE SENT ALONG TO MONITOR ME, TO MAKE SURE THE MISSION IS COMPLETED BECAUSE OF WHAT HAPPENED LAST TIME.
BUT I DON'T NEED NURSEMAIDS.
THIS IS WHAT THE CLAN ASHINA HAS DONE FOR CENTURIES...

...THIS IS WHAT CLAN ASHINA DOES. NOW.
I AM OF THIS CLAN. I CARRY THE CLAN SWORD

I WON'T DISHONOR IT.

WALK WITH ME.
YES, FATHER.
KUMORI, YOU HAVE DISAPPOINTED ME.
I KNOW, FATHER.

THE BUYER HAS ARRIVED. PUNCTUAL, AS WELL.

ABU AL-KHALFAN, SELF-APPOINTED COMMANDER OF THE ISLAMIC PARTISAN LEAGUE. VERY LOOSE TIES TO AL QAEDA.
NOT A MAJOR PLAYER...

BUT HE WILL BE, IF HE BUYS WHAT MAHMOOD IS SELLING.
JUST THE TWO BODYGUARDS.

ABU WAS THE NAME OF THE MONKEY IN "ALADDIN," THE DISNEY VERSION.
THAT DOESN'T SEEM QUITE SO FUNNY NOW.
NO.
IT DOESN'T.

DO YOU THINK KUMORI IS READY FOR THIS?
IT'S NOT FOR ME TO SAY.
BUT MY FATHER WILL BE MOST DISPLEASED IF SHE IS NOT.

THE AGREEMENT WAS NO BODYGUARDS FOR THE MEETING.
WAIT SOMEPLACE OUT OF THE WAY. DON'T DRAW ATTENTION TO YOURSELVES.
EXCUSE? EXCUSE?
TAKE PICTURE, PLEASE? PICTURE, YES?
NO. GO AWAY...
...I DON'T WANT THIS. TAKE IT BACK...
THANK YOU. THANK YOU. VERY KIND...
...I SAID NO...
ONE MOMENT PLEASE. HAVE OTHER CAMERA...
...OTHER CAMERA...
WHAT'S...
PHLINT
PHLINT
PHLINT

DOCTOR MAHMOOD? I AM--
I WOULD PREFER WE DIDN'T USE NAMES.
OF COURSE.
A FITTING LOCATION, IS IT NOT, MY FRIEND? CHRISTIANS BUILT THIS PLACE, MUSLIM HOLY WARRIORS TOOK IT FROM THEM.
THUS SHALL IT BE WITH ALL THE WORLD. GOD IS GREAT.

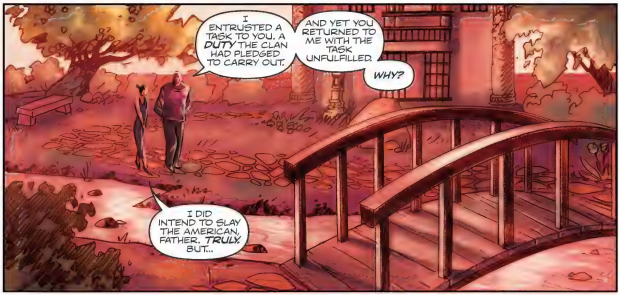
YOU HAVE WHAT I WANT. I HAVE WHAT YOU WANT. ONE MILLION EUROS. UNTRACEABLE.
WITH WHAT YOU PLACE IN MY HANDS, ONE DAY I WILL BRING THE WEST TO ITS KNEES.
YES, YES. DO WITH IT WHAT YOU WILL.
I'M NOT INTERESTED IN YOUR POLITICS. JUST GIVE ME MY--

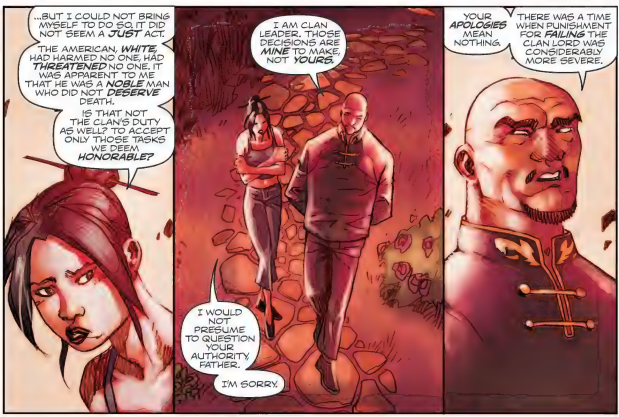
HELLO?
WHO ARE YOU?

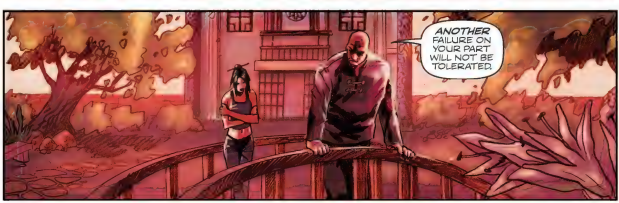
I'M SORRY, I...
...I BECAME LOST IN THE CHURCH. PLEASE, CAN YOU...
STUPID WOMAN!
WHO IS YOUR HUSBAND THAT HE ALLOWS YOU TO WANDER SO? GET OUT OF HERE, BEFORE I--

HRRK!
WHAT IS THIS?
WHAT IS THIS?!

SHHK!
QUIET.


I DID INTEND TO SLAY THE AMERICAN, FATHER. *TRULY.* BUT...
ENTRUSTED A TASK TO YOU. A *DUTY* THE CLAN HAD PLEDGED TO CARRY OUT.
AND YET YOU RETURNED TO ME WITH THE TASK UNFULFILLED.
WHY?

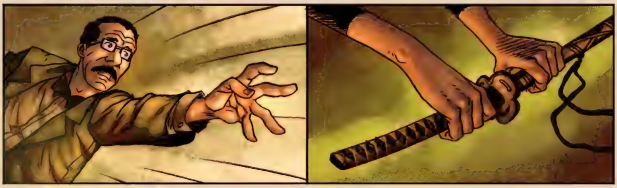

...BUT I COULD NOT BRING MYSELF TO DO SO. IT DID NOT SEEM A *JUST* ACT.
THE AMERICAN, *WHITE,* HAD HARMED NO ONE, HAD *THREATENED* NO ONE. IT WAS APPARENT TO ME THAT HE WAS A *NOBLE* MAN WHO DID NOT *DESERVE* DEATH.
IS THAT NOT THE CLAN'S DUTY AS WELL? TO ACCEPT ONLY THOSE TASKS WE DEEM *HONORABLE?*
I AM CLAN LEADER. THOSE DECISIONS ARE *MINE* TO MAKE, NOT *YOURS.*
I WOULD NOT PRESUME TO QUESTION YOUR AUTHORITY, FATHER.
I'M SORRY.
YOUR *APOLOGIES* MEAN NOTHING.
THERE WAS A TIME WHEN PUNISHMENT FOR *FAILING* THE CLAN LORD WAS CONSIDERABLY MORE SEVERE.


ANOTHER FAILURE ON YOUR PART WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.

...HNNNGH...
PHUNT
NO PROBLEMS?
THEY'RE MUCH BETTER BODIES THAN BODYGUARDS.
YOU'VE ALREADY HIDDEN THE TWO WHO WERE WITH AL-KHALFAN?
THEY WON'T BE FOUND UNTIL THEY START TO SMELL.
I HOPE KUMORI IS ENJOYING SIMILAR SUCCESS.
PERHAPS WE SHOULD GO HELP HER?
NO.

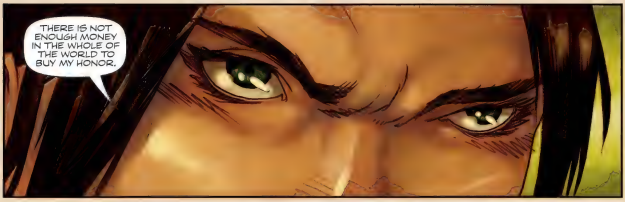
I DON'T...
...I DON'T UNDERSTAND. WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHO ARE...

...YOU?



PLEASE...
...PLEASE. THERE'S BEEN A MISTAKE. I'M NOT WHO YOU THINK I AM.
THERE'S BEEN NO MISTAKE.
YOU ARE DOCTOR AAMIR MAHMOOD. YOU ARE A NUCLEAR SCIENTIST. OR YOU WERE ONCE.
WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS? WHO ARE YOU?
MY NAME IS NOTHING TO YOU.
CERTAIN GOVERNMENTS ARE DISPLEASED WITH YOU, DOCTOR.
YOU SEEK TO OPEN A NUCLEAR BAZAAR AND PEDDLE SECRETS TO ANYONE WHO CAN MEET YOUR PRICE.
I WAS HIRED BY A WESTERN POWER TO MAKE SURE YOU DO NOT COMPLETE THIS TRANSACTION.
OR ANY OTHERS.
YOU'RE HERE TO KILL ME.
YES.

THERE'S MONEY! A MILLION EUROS!
AND MY RESEARCH! YOU COULD SELL THAT AS WELL!
TAKE EVERYTHING! TAKE IT ALL AND LET ME LIVE!


THERE IS NOT ENOUGH MONEY IN THE WHOLE OF THE WORLD TO BUY MY HONOR.

YOU MUST BE ...ARE YOU OF THE SAMURAI? YOU ARE SPOKEN OF ONLY IN WHISPERS, IF AT ALL.
I DID NOT BELIEVE YOU WERE REAL.
WE HAVE SURVIVED BECAUSE WE DO NOT EXIST.

ISN'T THERE ANY ROOM IN YOUR HEART FOR MERCY?
I'M NOT A VIOLENT MAN. I'VE NEVER HURT ANYONE.

HOW CAN YOU DO THIS?

IN A WEEK'S TIME, YOU WILL LEAVE FOR ISTANBUL. THERE, YOU WILL LOCATE A MAN NAMED DOCTOR AAMIR MAHMOOD, A SCIENTIST.
HE IS THE OBJECT OF YOUR MISSION. WE HAVE AN EMPLOYER WHO WISHES HIM PERMANENTLY REMOVED.
YOU WILL KILL THIS MAN, KUMORI.
IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?
YES.
SHIGERU AND HIRO WILL ACCOMPANY YOU.
YOU DO NOT TRUST ME TO ACCOMPLISH THIS THING BY MYSELF.
SHIGERU AND HIRO WILL ACCOMPANY YOU.
YOU HONOR ME WITH THIS TASK.
I WILL NOT DISAPPOINT YOU AGAIN, FATHER.

I HAVE A WIFE.
WE HAVE CHILDREN, A BOY AND A GIRL. I COULD SHOW YOU THEIR PICTURES.
PLEASE...
...I REALIZE WHAT I'VE DONE IS WRONG. I SWEAR TO YOU, IT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN AGAIN.
YOU COULD TAKE THE MONEY AND I COULD DISAPPEAR. I WOULD BE DEAD AS FAR AS THE REST OF WORLD IS CONCERNED.
NO ONE WOULD EVER HAVE TO KNOW...
...AND YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO ANYTHING.
YOU CAN JUST WALK AWAY...

ЗАТО

BLAM

HRRLK!

HGLIH...
...GHHH...
...HHH...

KUMORI?
IS IT FINISHED?
IT IS.
I DID WHAT WAS EXPECTED OF ME.
AND QUITE WELL, APPARENTLY.
ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I'M FINE.
THESE CAN'T BE LEFT BEHIND.
DON'T BOTHER WITH THE BODIES. WE'LL BE ON ANOTHER CONTINENT BEFORE THEY'RE DISCOVERED.
KUMORI...
...ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
I'M FINE.

FATHER.
WELCOME BACK, MY DAUGHTER.

NEWS OF YOUR SUCCESS HAS REACHED ME.
I CONGRATULATE YOU.
THANK YOU, FATHER.

IF YOU ARE PLEASED, I AM AS WELL.
YOU HAVE REACHED ANOTHER MILEPOST ALONG THE PATH YOU TREAD KUMORI.

DEATH IS YOUR CONSTANT COMPANION. IT WALKS BY YOUR SIDE. YOU MUST BE PREPARED TO DELIVER IT...
...OR EMBRACE IT...
...IN YOUR EVERY MOMENT.
I UNDERSTAND.

A DAY WILL COME, NOT TOO DISTANT FROM NOW WHEN YOU WILL BE MORE THAN ALL OF US...
...MORE THAN ANYONE WHO HAS EVER BEEN PART OF THIS CLAN.
I MERELY HOPE TO LIVE UP TO YOUR STANDARD, FATHER.
ALREADY YOU ARE ON THE VERGE OF SURPASSING ME. PERSIST IN YOUR TRAINING IN LEARNING THE WAY AND YOU WILL BE AS NO OTHER BEFORE YOU.

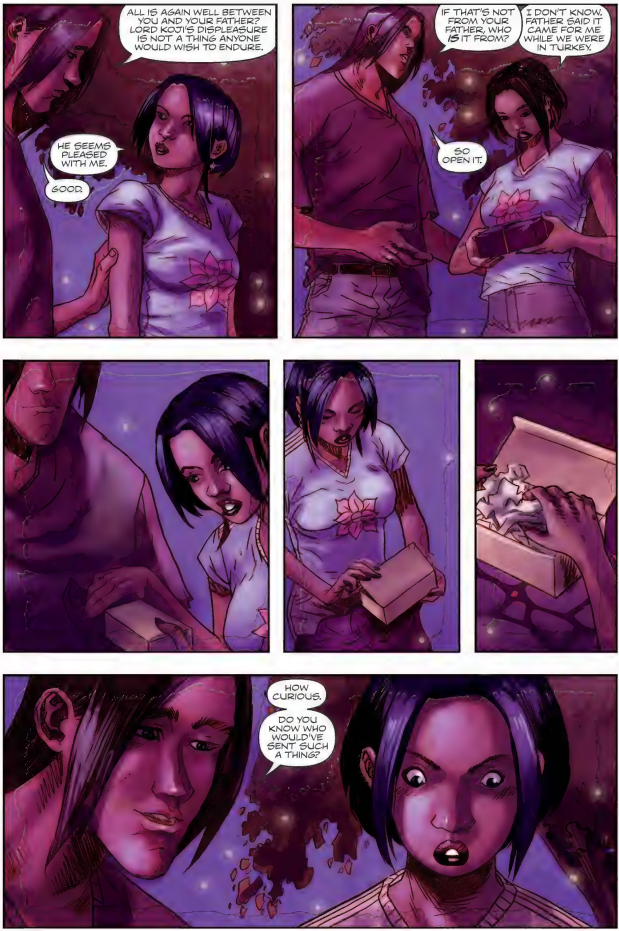
THIS ARRIVED FOR YOU WHILE YOU WERE GONE.
ARRIVED? SENT BY WHOM?
I HAVE NO WAY OF KNOWING.
IT WAS DELIVERED BY COURIER, AND THERE IS NO RETURN ADDRESS.

LIFE IS MADE ALL THE MORE INTRIGUING BY ITS LITTLE MYSTERIES.

YOU HAVE MADE YOUR FATHER PROUD, KUMORI.

I'VE NEVER RECEIVED A GIFT FROM YOUR FATHER UPON MY RETURN...

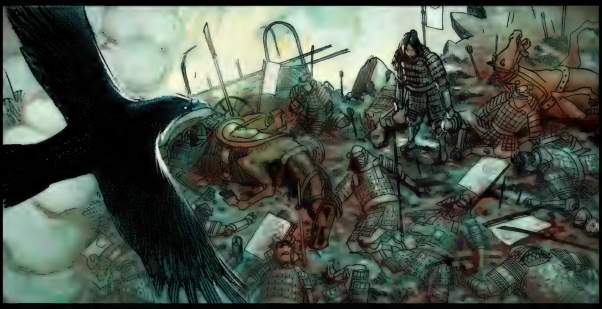
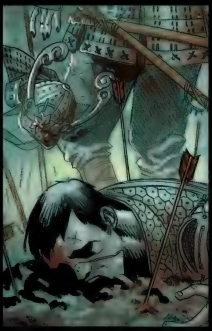
IT'S NOT FROM HIM, HIRO.
AH...
...THEN I DON'T FEEL QUITE SO BAD.
NO. YOU FEEL QUITE GOOD.
HIRO.
HIRO...
...NOT HERE.
NOT NOW.
WHEN?
LATER.
I'M SO VERY PLEASED YOU WERE ADOPTED INTO THE CLAN.

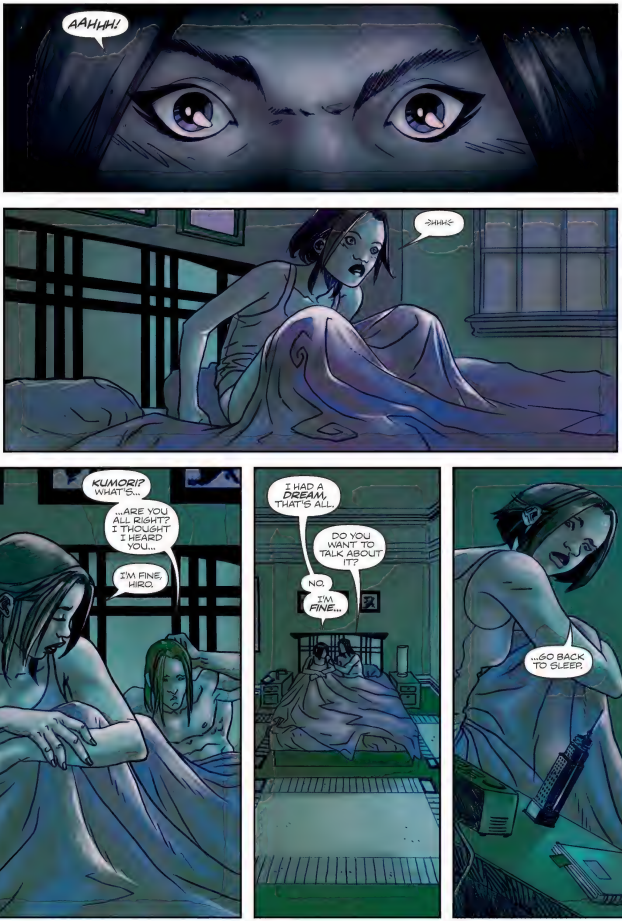

ALL IS AGAIN WELL BETWEEN YOU AND YOUR FATHER? LORD KOO'S DISPLEASURE IS NOT A THING ANYONE WOULD WISH TO ENDURE.
HE SEEMS PLEASED WITH ME.
GOOD.
IF THAT'S NOT FROM YOUR FATHER, WHO IS IT FROM?
I DON'T KNOW. FATHER SAID IT CAME FOR ME WHILE WE WERE IN TURKEY.
SO OPEN IT.
HOW CURIOUS.
DO YOU KNOW WHO WOULD'VE SENT SUCH A THING?

KUMORI?
KUMORI?
TO BE CONTINUED!

CHAPTER 4

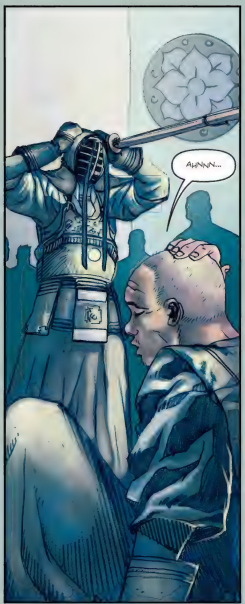
"PERCEPTION IS STRONG AND SIGHT WEAK. IN STRATEGY IT IS IMPORTANT TO SEE DISTANT THINGS AS IF THEY WERE CLOSE AND TO TAKE A DISTANCED VIEW OF CLOSE THINGS."
— MIYAMOTO MUSASHI


AAHHH!
-SHHH-
KUMORI? WHAT'S...
...ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? I THOUGHT I HEARD YOU...
I'M FINE, HIRO.
I HAD A DREAM, THAT'S ALL.
DO YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT?
NO. I'M FINE...
...GO BACK TO SLEEP.

KLAK
KLAK
KLAK
KLAK
KLAK
KLAK
HFF!

CEASE!
KLAK
KLAK
CEASE!
KLAK
AHG!


AHNN...

YOU HAVE MUCH TO LEARN, TSUYOSHI.

THIS WAS TO BE AN EXERCISE, KUMORI, NOT AN EXCUSE TO BLOODY A CLAN TRAINEE.
WHY DID YOU NOT OBEY MY ORDER? DID YOU NOT HEAR ME?
I DID HEAR YOU, FATHER.
I... LOST MYSELF. I APOLOGIZE.
I MEAN NO DISRESPECT, BUT IN TRUTH THERE IS NO ONE HERE WHO IS A SUITABLE OPPONENT FOR ME, MUCH LESS MY EQUAL.

NO ONE WHO CAN PRESENT A CHALLENGE.

KUMORI, YOU ARE DESTINED TO BE GREATER THAN ANY OF US, BUT YOU MUST NOT--
I CAN PROVIDE A CHALLENGE...

...IF THAT IS WHAT MY SISTER WISHES.

SHIGERU? ARE YOU CERTAIN?
OF COURSE.
KUMORI AND I OFTEN SPARRED AS YOUTHS. I BELIEVE I AM A "SUITABLE OPPONENT" AT THE VERY LEAST.
KUMORI, THIS IS AGREEABLE TO YOU?
IT IS.

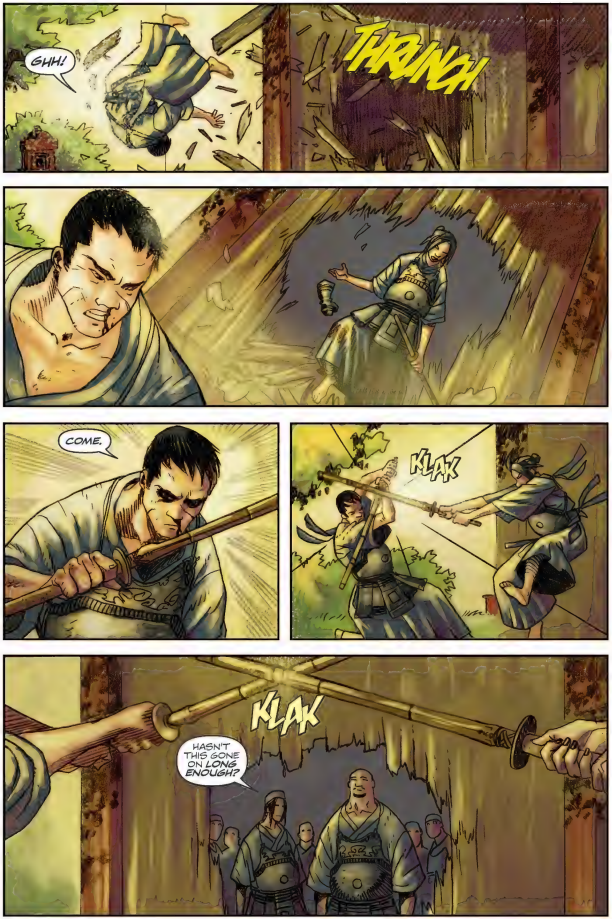
VERY WELL.
I SUSPECT THIS WAS IN MANY WAYS INEVITABLE.

I APPRECIATE YOUR KINDNESS, BROTHER.
I SHALL BE INTERESTED TO HEAR IF YOU FEEL THE SAME WHEN THIS IS CONCLUDED.

KLAK

KLAK
SHIGERU GIVES A GOOD ACCOUNTING OF HIMSELF, LORD KOJI, HE PRESSES HER.
PERHAPS...
KLAK
SKRAK
SKRAK
HGH!

OR, PERHAPS IT IS SHIGERU'S WELFARE WE SHOULD BE CONCERNED ABOUT.
PERHAPS...
ENOUGH?
PUH
NO.


GHH!
THRUNCH
COME.
KLAK
KLAK
HASN'T THIS GONE ON LONG ENOUGH?

KLAK
KLAK
KLAK
SHUNK
ENOUGH?
NO.
AS YOU WISH.

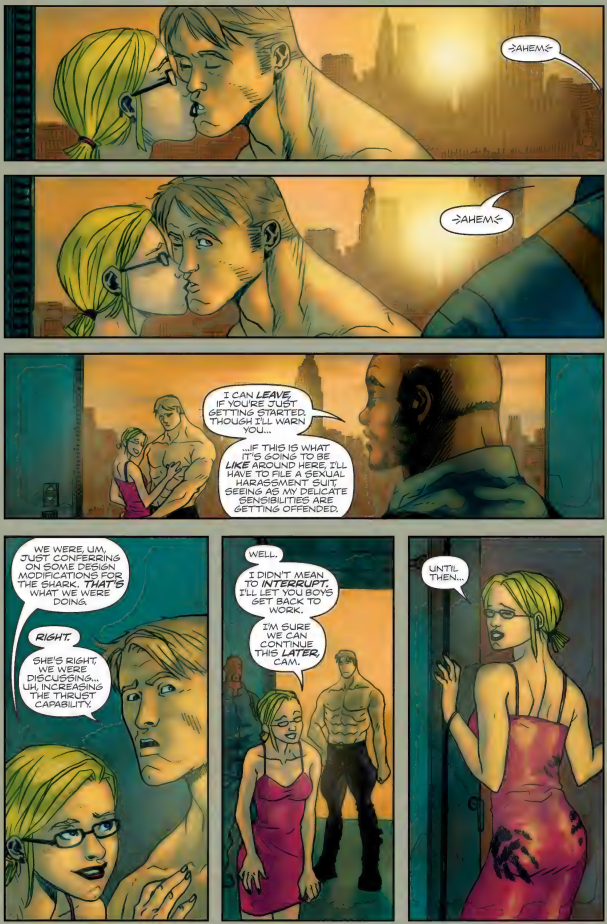
UHN!
THAP
HOW IS IT YOU...?
KKKKK

KA-KOOM
YOU'RE...
...YOU'RE NOT EVEN HUMAN!
DON'T SAY THAT, SHIGERU. I'M YOUR SISTER--
DON'T TOUCH ME.

ENOUGH.
THIS IS ENDED.
A MOST IMPRESSIVE EFFORT SHIGERU. AGAINST ANY OTHER OPPONENT, THE VICTORY WOULD HAVE BEEN YOURS.
EVEN IN DEFEAT, YOU PRESERVE THE CLAN'S HONOR AND YOUR OWN.
THANK YOU, FATHER.
THESE THINGS I CAN DO, FATHER, I DON'T UNDERSTAND--
YOU EMBRACE YOUR DESTINY, KUMORI.
SWIFTLY YOU ARE BECOMING THAT WHICH CLAN ASHINA NEEDS YOU TO BE.
YES, FATHER.
HAVE YOUR WOUNDS TENDED, SHIGERU.
AS YOU SAY, FATHER.
FATHER.
I HAVE BEEN PLAGUED BY... THOUGHTS... OF MY PREVIOUS FAILURE. I FEEL AS THOUGH I'VE BETRAYED THE CLAN WITH MY ACTIONS, AND DISAPPOINTED YOU.
I CANNOT ALLOW THE CLAN TO SUFFER BECAUSE OF ME.
I MUST MAKE AMENDS. I MUST CORRECT MY FAILURE, AS A DEMONSTRATION OF MY LOYALTY.
I WILL KILL THE AMERICAN.
BUT, WHEN I RETURN, YOU MUST SHOW ME MY DEVOTION IS WELL PLACED.
NO MORE CRYPTIC COMMENTS. NO MORE EUPHEMISMS.
I WANT TO KNOW WHAT I AM.

SEEN TODAY'S HEADLINE?
REAT SAVE GREAT WHITE!
AW, MAN...
...WHAT'D I DO WRONG NOW, TAM?
NOTHING. NOT A THING.
CAN'T YOU TAKE A COMPLIMENT? I'M JUST SAYING YOU'VE BEEN DOING A GREAT JOB, CAM. DOING YOUR WHOLE HERO THING. KEEPING THE SHARKS IN ONE PIECE.
OH.
OH, OKAY. THANKS.
SO, UH, WHAT'S WITH THE DRESS AND EVERYTHING?
I'M NOT ALLOWED TO WEAR A DRESS ONCE IN A WHILE?
BY THE WAY, WHERE'S EMMANUEL?
RAN DOWN TO THAT DRUG STORE ON THE CORNER. I THINK HE NEEDS CONTACT SOLUTION OR SOMETHING.
GOOD. BECAUSE ... WELL, I WANTED TO TALK TO YOU.
I'VE BEEN DOING A LOT OF THINKING.
I DON'T WANT THINGS BETWEEN US TO BE LIKE THIS, CAMERON. I DON'T WANT TO BE BICKERING ALL THE TIME.
I GUESS WHAT I'M SAYING IS, I WANT US GET ALONG BETTER.
A LOT BETTER.

COME ON, CAM. WE BOTH KNOW IT'S THERE. THE ELEPHANT THAT'S ALWAYS IN THE ROOM WITH US.
I THINK MAYBE IT'S TIME WE STOPPED IGNORING IT.
AND I THINK IF I WAITED FOR YOU TO REALIZE THAT I'D BE WAITING FOREVER.
I'M... UM...
...WELL, MY HANDS ARE ALL GREASY FROM...
THAT'S ALL RIGHT...
...I DON'T MIND GETTING A LITTLE DIRTY...


:>AHEM:<
:>AHEM:<
I CAN *LEAVE*, IF YOURE JUST GETTING STARTED. THOUGH I'LL WARN YOU...
...IF THIS IS WHAT IT'S GOING TO BE *LIKE* AROUND HERE, I'LL HAVE TO FILE A SEXUAL HARASSMENT SUIT, SEEING AS MY DELICATE SENSIBILITIES ARE GETTING OFFENDED.
WE WERE, UM, JUST CONFERRING ON SOME DESIGN MODIFICATIONS FOR THE SHARK. *THAT'S* WHAT WE WERE DOING.
RIGHT.
SHE'S RIGHT, WE WERE DISCUSSING... UH, INCREASING THE THRUST CAPABILITY.
WELL.
I DIDN'T MEAN TO *INTERRUPT*, I'LL LET YOU BOYS GET BACK TO WORK.
I'M SURE WE CAN CONTINUE THIS *LATER*, CAM.
UNTIL THEN...

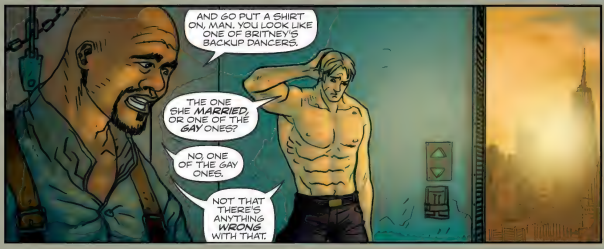
SO...
...ALL THAT SEXUAL TENSION BETWEEN YOU TWO FINALLY BOILED OVER, HUH?
APPARENTLY.

WHAT? YOU DON'T SEEM TOO ENTHUSED WHICH YOU SHOULD BE, BECAUSE THAT'S A SMART, PRETTY WOMAN WHO IS FAR TOO GOOD FOR YOU.
NO, I AM. TAM'S GREAT.
IT'S, JUST...
JUST WHAT?

NOTHING.

YOU WANT TO GET A LITTLE JAPANESE?
HUH?!

JAPANESE FOR LUNCH.
DO YOU WANT TO GET SUSHI FOR LUNCH?
OH.
UM... YEAH, OKAY.


AND GO PUT A SHIRT ON, MAN. YOU LOOK LIKE ONE OF BRITNEY'S BACKUP DANCERS.
THE ONE SHE MARRIED, OR ONE OF THE GAY ONES?
NO, ONE OF THE GAY ONES.
NOT THAT THERE'S ANYTHING WRONG WITH THAT.

YEAH, OKAY. GIVE ME A MINUTE.
LET'S GO TO JAPAN.
NEXT: SECRETS ARE REVEALED AND SACRIFICES MADE— OH, AND KUMORI VS. GREAT WHITE, ROUND 2!

CHAPTER 5

"IN BATTLE, IF YOU MAKE YOUR OPPONENT FLINCH, YOU HAVE ALREADY WON."
-- MIYAMOTO MUSASHI
THUNK
THIS TIME, I WON'T FAIL THE CLAN.
THUNK
I WILL KILL THE AMERICAN...
THUNK

...AND PROVE TO MY FATHER THAT I BELONG HERE.
I DO NOT THINK IT IS YOUR FATHER THAT DOUBTS YOU, KUMORI.
ARE YOU TRYING TO CONVINCE HIM...
OR YOURSELF?
YOU WERE ADOPTED INTO THE CLAN, HIRO...

...AND YET THERE HAS NEVER BEEN DOUBT THAT YOU BELONG, BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT I CAN DO...
...THERE ARE THOSE WHO DOUBT MY PLACE.
INCLUDING ME.

KRUNK
YOU SEE?
THIS IS WHAT I MUST DO.
KUMORI?
FORGIVE ME FOR INTRUDING, BUT YOU HAVE A VISITOR AT THE FRONT GATE.
A VISITOR FOR ME?
HOW DID ANYONE EVEN FIND THE CLAN COMPOUND?
HE IS A STRANGER. HE SAID HE WOULD ONLY SPEAK WITH YOU.

HE WOULD NOT GIVE HIS NAME.
OPEN IT.
KUMORI? HI...
...REMEMBER ME? CAMERON WHITE?
YOU TRIED TO KILL ME?

YOU WANTED ME?
WE HAVE AN ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU, SYNTH.
CAMERON WHITE, THE FREELANCE BASED IN NEW YORK CITY WE'D SELECTED FOR RETIREMENT, HAS APPEARED IN JAPAN.
HE'S VISITING THE CLAN ASHINA...
...IN FACT VISITING THE SAME WOMAN WHO INTERCEDED IN YOUR ATTEMPT TO RETIRE ANDERSON IN TOKYO. *
* IN ISSUE ONE.
ASHINA'S USEFULNESS ON ASSIGNMENTS LIKE THE MAHMOOD HIT HAS BECOME OUTWEIGHED BY THEIR REFUSAL TO SERVE OUR INTERESTS EXCLUSIVELY.

SO WHO DO YOU WANT DEAD?
BOTH OF THEM. HE'S A WILD CARD WE WON'T TOLERATE, AND SHE'S DEVELOPING INTO ... SOMETHING DANGEROUS ... WE'RE NOT SURE WE CAN CONTROL.
ARE YOU UP TO IT?
WHAT DO YOU THINK?
BITCH.

FATHER... MIGHT I SPEAK WITH YOU?
OF COURSE.
I APOLOGIZE FOR HAVING INTERRUPTED YOUR PRIVACY.
THERE IS NOTHING SO IMPORTANT THAT I WOULD NOT SPARE TIME FOR MY DAUGHTER. WHY HAVE YOU SOUGHT ME OUT?
I THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT THE AMERICAN, WHITE, IS HERE. HE IS WITHIN THE COMPOUND.
AH.
THEN IT SEEMS YOU WILL BE SAVED THE TROUBLE OF A FAIR AMOUNT OF TRAVEL.
AND WHAT IS IT YOU WISH OF ME, MY DAUGHTER?
I AM SOMEWHAT... SURPRISED... BY HIS PRESENCE, FATHER.
I DID NOT FORESEE THIS TURN OF EVENTS, AND I... I THOUGHT PERHAPS...
KUMORI...
...THE DECISION MUST BE YOURS.
I TRUST YOU WILL MAKE THE RIGHT DECISION.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONFIDENCE, FATHER.

I'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR YOU.
HIRO?
THERE'S TALK IN THE COMPOUND THAT THE AMERICAN HAS COME HERE. IS THIS TRUE?
YES.
HE WAITS IN THE RECEPTION HALL.
DO YOU NEED ME?
THIS IS...
...I MUST DO THIS MYSELF.
IF THAT IS WHAT YOU WISH.
BUT IF YOU SHOULD NEED ME, I WILL COME TO YOUR SIDE, KUMORI. ALWAYS.
I KNOW.

DUDE, THIS WAS NUTS.
YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO COME, EMMANUEL.
YEAH, WELL, SOMEBODY HAD TO KEEP AN EYE ON YOU.

BUT WHEN YOU SAID "JAPAN," I FIGURED YOU MEANT TOKYO AND GEISHAS AND BULLET TRAINS...
...NOT SOMETHING STRAIGHT OUT OF A KUROSAWA FLICK, INCLUDING SAMURAI WITH SWORDS.

THANK YOU FOR KEEPING OUR GUEST COMPANY, SHIGERU.
DO YOU WISH ME TO STAY, SISTER?
NO...

...I'LL SEE TO MATTERS.

BROTHER, PERHAPS YOU COULD TAKE MR. WHITE'S FRIEND ON A WALK AND SHOW HIM THE COMPOUND.
OF COURSE.
YOU KNOW, I'M SURE IT'S VERY NICE AND EVERYTHING, BUT TRUTHFULLY, I'D RATHER NOT.
I'M FINE HERE, REALLY.

I ASSURE YOU, NO HARM WILL COME TO YOU.
IT AIN'T ME I'M WORRIED ABOUT, LADY...
...IT'S HIM.
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, I'LL BE FINE.

RIGHT?
SO ALONE AT LAST.
HOW DID YOU FIND ME?

WASN'T EASY, BUT DOING WHAT I DO, YOU MEET PEOPLE.
SO I KNEW A GUY WHO KNEW A GUY WHO KNEW ANOTHER GUY.

WHY DID YOU FIND ME?
WHY DID I FIND YOU?

I FIGURED YOU ALREADY KNEW THE ANSWER TO THAT ONE.
I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT YOU. A LOT. WHEN I MET YOU IN NEW YORK, THERE WAS ... SOMETHING BETWEEN US.

I DON'T THINK I'M THE ONLY ONE WHO FELT IT.
I WAS SENT TO NEW YORK TO KILL YOU. I VERY NEARLY DID SO.
BUT YOU DIDN'T KILL ME.

AND YOU DIDN'T EXACTLY RESIST WHEN I KISSED YOU.
THAT ... SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED.
ME KISSING YOU?
OR YOU RESISTING ME?

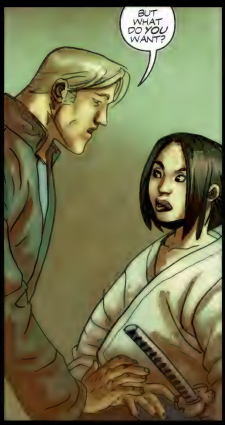
WHO ARE YOU, KUMORI?
A MEMBER OF THE CLAN, ASHINA.
THAT'S ALL I'VE EVER WISHED TO BE. THAT'S ALL I AM.

I DOUBT THAT VERY MUCH. NOT WITH THE THINGS YOU CAN DO. THE THINGS I SAW YOU DO.
I'M...

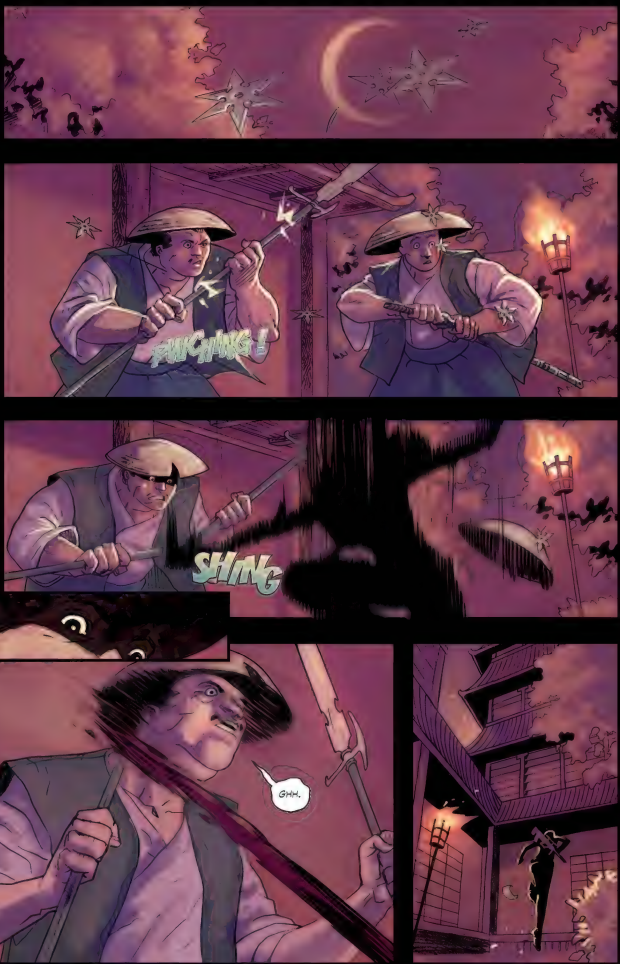
...I'M NOT SURE WHAT I AM, OR WHERE I FIT IN.
I JUST KNOW THAT I MUST NOT DISHONOR THE CLAN.

I MUST DO WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME.

THAT'S WHAT THE CLAN WANTS.


BUT WHAT DO YOU WANT?

LET GO.
IS THAT WHAT YOU REALLY WANT ME TO DO?


CLANG
SHING
GHH.

NO. THIS CAN'T BE...
ENOUGH!
HIRO, I'M SORRY. I DIDN'T MEAN FOR YOU TO...
AW, MAN...
...YOU NEVER SAID YOU HAD A BOYFRIEND!

STAND ASIDE, KUMORI. IF YOU WILL NOT PRESERVE THE CLAN'S HONOR, AS WELL AS YOUR OWN...
I WILL.
NO.
HOW COULD YOU DO THIS?
TO THE CLAN?
TO ME?
I DIDN'T MEAN FOR IT TO HAPPEN!
WAIT...
SWAAASH

EVERYBODY IN ONE PLACE.
HOW NICE.

YOU.
YOU WERE THE ONE I FACED IN TOKYO.
THEN SHE WON'T LIVE LONG ENOUGH FOR A REMATCH.
>HK<
WHICH ONE ARE YOU? THE BROTHER?
NO, THE LOVER. I THINK. THEY DIDN'T SAY I SHOULD KILL YOU...
>HRRK<

GHH...
...GH...
...HHH...
...BUT THEY DON'T SAY I SHOULDN'T.
...MUHAHAH!
HIRO!
IT COULDN'T BE MORE FITTING IF I'D PLANNED IT...
SHHNG
...KILLING YOU WITH YOUR OWN LOVER'S SWORD.

WHP
HNNF!
AGH!
THWIP
YOU COME HERE SEEKING DEATH?
I WILL GIVE IT TO YOU MOST GLADLY!
I'M HERE... I GUESS I MIGHT AS WELL KILL THE WHOLE FAMILY.
FACE ME!

KRANG

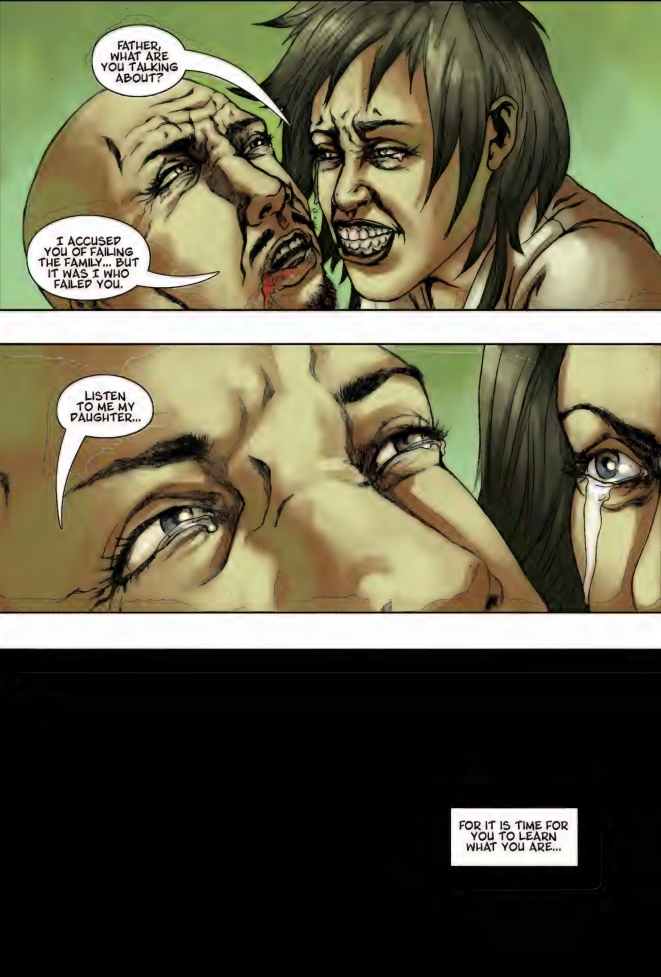
FATHER!
TO BE CONCLUDED!

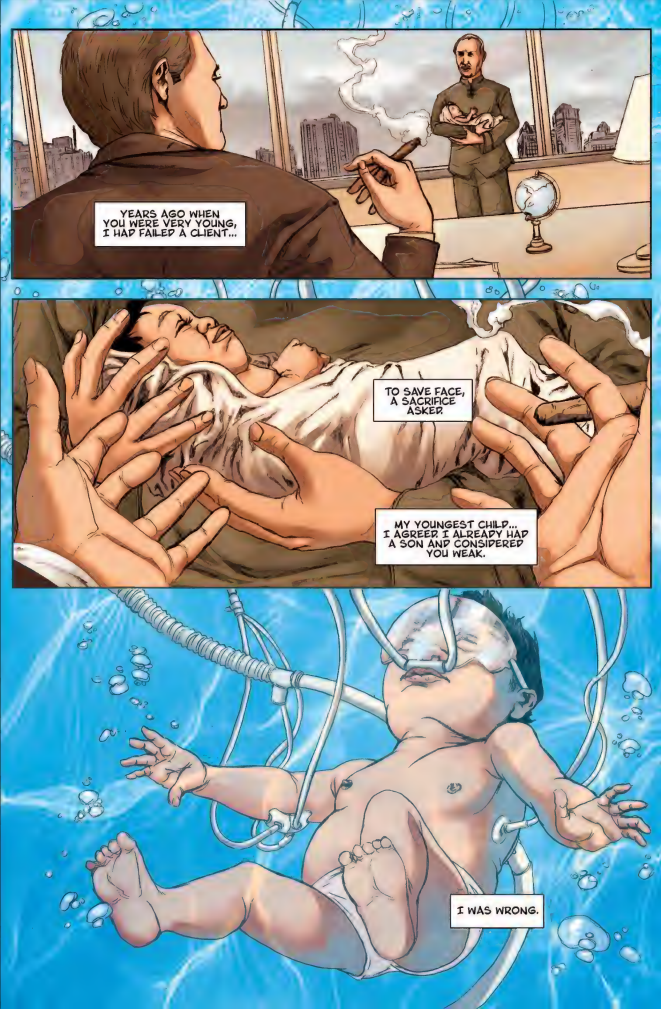
CHAPTER SIX

AIEEE!
"THE ONLY REASON A WARRIOR IS ALIVE IS TO FIGHT, AND THE ONLY REASON A WARRIOR FIGHTS IS TO WIN." MIYAMOTO MUSHASHI

WHO'S NEXT?
CLAN ASHINA SHALL BE AVENGED.
CAMERON, HEAD'S UP!
UHF!
FATHER NOOO!
GHH... ...GH... ...HHH...
STAY WITH YOUR FATHER, KUMORI. I'M GOING TO GIVE THIS CRAZY CHICK A NEW YORK WELCOME.
DON'T LEAVE ME, FATHER.
KUMORI...
...I HAVE BROUGHT SHAME TO OUR FAMILY'S NAME...

BLAM!
BLAM!
THREE ON ONE, HUH?
I DON'T THINK I LIKE YOUR CHANCES.
SHANG!
WHUD!
OOOPH!

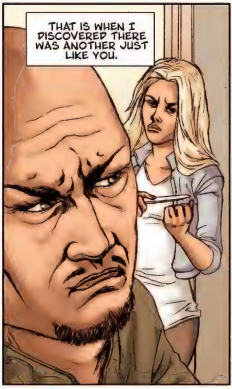

FATHER, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
I ACCUSED YOU OF FAILING THE FAMILY... BUT IT WAS I WHO FAILED YOU.
LISTEN TO ME MY DAUGHTER...
FOR IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO LEARN WHAT YOU ARE...


YEARS AGO WHEN YOU WERE VERY YOUNG, I HAD FAILED A CLIENT...
TO SAVE FACE, A SACRIFICE ASKED.
MY YOUNGEST CHILD... I AGREED. I ALREADY HAD A SON AND CONSIDERED YOU WEAK.
I WAS WRONG.

YOUR SKILLS STARTED DEVELOPING AT A RAPID PACE.
ALTHOUGH YOUR BROTHER WAS OLDER, YOU WERE HIS EQUAL.
AND SOON YOU HAD SURPASSED HIM.
I COULDN'T HAVE BEEN PROUDER OF THE WARRIOR YOU HAD BECOME.

I REGRETTED SERVING YOU UP AS THEIR GUINEA PIG AND WANTED TO END MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CLIENT.

TO PREVENT FURTHER SHAME TO THE CLAN ASHINA, I AGREED TO CONTINUE ASSIGNMENTS FOR THEM, BUT INSISTED YOU BE LEFT ALONE UNTIL ADULTHOOD.


THAT IS WHEN I DISCOVERED THERE WAS ANOTHER JUST LIKE YOU.

I WENT HOME AND CONTINUED YOUR TRAINING...

... FOR THE INEVITABLE PAY YOUR TWO PATHS CROSSER FORGIVE ME FOR NOT TELLING YOU SOONER...

SWING!
AHNF!
YOU'VE BEEN SELECTED FOR RETIREMENT, HERO. I HOPE YOU HAVE A GOOD 401...
K?
AHHH!
I SEE WE'RE READY FOR ROUND...

SKRaSH

TWOOO!

SO IT'S TRUE? YOU'RE JUST LIKE ME.
NO, I'M BETTER.
YOU HAVE NO HONOR!
WHATEVER IT TAKES TO GET THE JOB DONE.
THEN YOU WILL DIE WITHOUT HONOR!
WHUD!
KRACK!

FIRST BLOOD GOES TO YOU, BUT...
THE KILL WILL GO TO ME!
WHUD
AIEEE!
OOOPH.
NEVER BRING A KNIFE TO A GUN FIGHT.

KUMORI!
AIEEE!
BLAM!
GHHH!

GENERALLY SPEAKING, THE WAY OF THE WARRIOR...

... IS RESOLUTE ACCEPTANCE OF DEATH.

LATER THAT DAY...
YOUR PLACE IS WITH YOUR CLAN. WE NEED YOU TO HELP LEAD
CLAN ASHINA IS IN GOOD HANDS, BROTHER.
HE WAS VERY PROUD OF YOU.
YOU HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO PROVE.
ONLY TO MYSELF. FAREWELL, BROTHER.
SO WHERE TO?
SOMEWHERE WHERE I CAN FIGURE OUT WHO I AM AND WHAT MY PURPOSE IS. SOMEWHERE...

... WHERE THE POSSIBILITIES ARE ENDLESS.
HELL OF A VIEW, ISN'T IT?
END

A young woman who's been raised in the cloistered environment of a hi-tech samurai clan is dispatched on her first mission in the West: to kill a self-styled super hero. Her confrontation with this stranger awakens in her the realization that she is more than human--and her love for him puts her at odds with her family and everything she's been raised to believe.

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